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CAPITOL STUFF

By TED LEWIS

Washington, Oct. 28 — The fabulous operations of ousted Senate flunky Robert G. Baker and the conflict of interest resignation of Navy Secretary Fred Korth are obvious sources of political embarrassment to Vice President Lyndon Johnson.

This is because both Baker and Korth have been considered proteges of Johnson. For this reason, "dump Johnson" reports are spreading to the effect that President Kennedy may now choose another running-mate in 1964.

Such speculation is absolute drivel. The White House is operating on the basis that the ticket will be Kennedy and Johnson again, and all the evidence since the Baker and Korth cases broke makes that clear.

Last week, for example, Johnson made a speech before the Massachusetts branch of the American Association of Manufacturers. He did so at the strong urging of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, the President's brother.

The Vice President followed this with an appearance in Connecticut. He was introduced by Democratic National Chairman John Bailey, who predicted a 1964 victory for the "Kennedy-Johnson ticket."

Kennedy himself undoubtedly stands pat similarly. As he said at a May, 1962, press conference: "The Vice President will be on the ticket, if he chooses to run again." And Johnson obviously chooses that more than any other one thing, for he has his eye on 1968, when Kennedy, if elected next year, cannot run again.

There is, however, little argument that Lyndon has been personally singled a bit by the Korth and Baker goings-on. Otherwise there would not be the effort by Johnson's political supporters to supply data designed to show that neither Korth nor Baker can be properly tagged as "Lyndon's boy."

Particularly of course, Bobby Baker, now under Senate investigation for big-scale financial deals while only a \$19,600-a-year secretary to the Senate Democratic Majority.

Lyndon Can't Duck All Responsibility

For five of the eight years in which Baker held the job, Johnson (1955-1960) was Senate majority leader and Baker his right-hand man, a sort of Mr. Fixit flunky, clearly effective in a personable, shrewd way, for he stayed on when Sen. Mike Mansfield (Mont.) succeeded Lyndon in 1961 in the top party post.

So Johnson has to take some responsibility for Baker, even if a good case can be made out that Bobby wasn't Lyndon's protege to begin with. The fact is that Baker, who started off as a page boy in 1942, rose on the staircase escalator until in 1955 he was in line to be Senate Democratic secretary when Johnson was named majority leader.



Lyndon Johnson
Has a lot of bother

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He was originally sponsored by his home state Senator, the late Bernet Maybank of South Carolina. And at the party caucus in 1955, at which he was proposed for the \$19,600 secretary post, his sponsor was Sen. Olin Johnson (D-S.C.), while the late Sen. Estes Kefauver (Tenn.) moved that Baker be named unanimously.

Similarly, at this time, it is claimed that resigned Navy Secretary Korth, even though from Texas, was not Johnson's "protege." Therefore, of course, the Vice President cannot be blamed for Korth's extracurricular activities such as soliciting business for his Texas bank while heading the Navy.

A Certain Failure of Judgment

In the case of Korth, there is little doubt that Johnson has had to endure unwarranted slurs. Korth was the choice of Defense Undersecretary Roswell Gilpatrick. Johnson was so informed and agreed, but he never promoted his fellow Texan for the post.

Despite such evidence that the Vice President was never the longtime sponsor of either Korth or Baker, the mere fact that Korth is from Texas and Baker worked so long for Lyndon is made to order for partisan sniping.

In hindsight at least, Johnson, it would appear, should be most sensitive about his relationship with Baker. It was certainly a distinct error in judgment for the Vice President and Mrs. Johnson to participate in the July, 1962, grand opening of Baker's lush Carousel motel in North Ocean City, Md.

This was the \$1-million seashore inn which was Baker's first big financial venture. Among the guests at the big champagne blow-out, in addition to the Johnsons, were two busloads of Senators and Representatives, similarly anxious to help Bobby succeed in building up a fortune on \$19,600 a year.

Where Did He Get All That Dough?

It now turns out that there was also a mystery guest at the shindig, to which Johnson gave class. This was the lush German model who was booted back to her homeland last August for unbridled party girl operations among unknown capital VIPs, and who, if she didn't know Baker or his lobbyist friends, wouldn't have been invited to the grand opening.

Of course, at that time Baker was not working for Johnson, but it would seem that at least one of the legislators present might have wondered how a Senate employee could get the dough to build a big swanky motel. Or if not then, later on when Baker moved his family into a \$125,000 mansion in the same ultra-exclusive suburb where the Vice President lives.

The Vice President may not be willing to admit it, but some of his Senate Democratic colleagues confess privately they were fall guys for the blandishments of the nimble and articulate Bobby Baker.

Johnson was clearly taken in also, but without any lasting damage to his career. Even if the White House was toying at any time with the idea of dumping Lyndon in 1964, it couldn't seize on the Baker case to do so. If Johnson was a sucker, so were all 47 Democratic Senators. Moreover, if not Lyndon, who in 1962? There isn't even a good second choice on the Johnson.